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**Diverse coalition of advocates urges Congress to pass legislation  
to protect kids and teens online**

**60** leading advocacy organizations say unregulated Big Tech business model is  
*“fundamentally at odds with children’s wellbeing”*

BOSTON, MA and WASHINGTON, DC - March 22, 2022 – Congressional leaders in the House and Senate were urged today to enact much needed protections for children and teens online. In [a letter](#) to Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, a broad coalition of health, safety, privacy and education groups said it was time to ensure that Big Tech can no longer undermine the wellbeing of America’s youth. The letter reiterated President Biden’s State of the Union address call for increased online protections for young people.

In their letter, the advocates outlined how the prevailing business model of Big Tech creates a number of serious risks facing young people on the internet today, including mental health struggles, loss of privacy, manipulation, predation, and cyberbullying. The advocates underscored the dangers posed by rampant data collection on popular platforms, including algorithmic discrimination and targeting children at particularly vulnerable moments.

The reforms called for by the advocates include:

- Protections for children and teens wherever they are online, not just on “child-directed” sites;
- Privacy protections to all minors;
- A ban on targeted advertising to young people;
- Prohibition of algorithmic discrimination of children and teens;
- Establishment of a duty of care that requires digital service providers to make the best interests of children a primary design consideration and prevent and mitigate harms to minors;
- Requiring platforms to turn on the most protective settings for minors by default;
- Greater resources for enforcement by the Federal Trade Commission.

United by the desire to see Big Tech’s harmful business model regulated, the advocates’ letter represents a landmark moment for the movement to increase privacy protections for children and teenagers online, especially due to the wide-ranging fields and focus areas represented by signatories. Among the **60** signatories to the advocates’ letter are: Fairplay, Center for Digital Democracy, Accountable Tech, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, American Psychological Association, Center for Humane Technology, Common Sense, Darkness to Light, ECPAT-USA, Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC), National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health, National Center on Sexual Exploitation, National Eating Disorders Association, Network for Public Education,

ParentsTogether, Public Citizen, Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine, and Exposure Labs, creators of *The Social Dilemma*.

### **Signatories on the need for legislation to protect young people online:**

“Congress last passed legislation to protect children online 24 years ago – nearly a decade before the most popular social media platforms even existed. Big Tech's unregulated business model has led to a race to the bottom to collect data and maximize profits, no matter the harm to young people. We agree with the president that the time is now to update COPPA, expand privacy protections to teens, and put an end to the design abuses that manipulate young people into spending too much time online and expose them to harmful content.” – Josh Golin, Executive Director, Fairplay.

“It's long past time for Congress to put a check on Big Tech's pervasive manipulation of young people's attention and exploitation of their personal data. We applaud President Biden's call to ban surveillance advertising targeting young people and are heartened by the momentum to rein in Big Tech and establish critical safeguards for minors engaging with their products.”  
–Nicole Gill, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Accountable Tech.

“Digital technology plays an outsized role in the lives of today's children and adolescents, exacerbated by the dramatic changes to daily life experienced during the pandemic. Pediatricians see the impact of these platforms on our patients and recognize the growing alarm about the role of digital platforms, in particular social media, in contributing to the youth mental health crisis. It has become clear that, from infancy through the teen years, children's well-being is an afterthought in developing digital technologies. Strengthening privacy, design, and safety protections for children and adolescents online is one of many needed steps to create healthier environments that are more supportive of their mental health and well-being.”– Moira Szilagyi, MD, PhD, FAAP, President, American Academy of Pediatrics.

“Children and teens are at the epicenter of a pervasive data-driven marketing system that takes advantage of their inherent developmental vulnerabilities. We agree with President Biden: now is the time for Congress to act and enact safeguards that protect children and teens. It's also long overdue for Congress to enact comprehensive legislation that protects parents and other adults from unfair, manipulative, discriminatory and privacy invasive commercial surveillance practices.” – Katharina Kopp, Ph.D. Policy Director, Center for Digital Democracy.

"President Biden's powerful State of the Union plea to Congress to hold social media platforms accountable for the 'national experiment' they're conducting on our kids and teens could not be more important. It is clear that young people are being harmed by these platforms that continue to prioritize profits over the wellbeing of its youngest users. Children and teens' mental health is at stake. Congress and the Administration must act now to pass legislation to protect children's and teens' privacy and well-being online." – Jim Steyer, Founder and CEO, Common Sense.

“Online protections for children are woefully outdated and it's clear tech companies are more interested in profiting off of vulnerable children than taking steps to prevent them from getting hurt on their platforms. American kids are facing a mental health crisis partly fueled by social media and parents are unable to go it alone against these billion dollar companies. We need Congress to update COPPA, end predatory data collection on children, and regulate design practices that are contributing to social media addiction, mental health disorders, and even death.”– Justin Ruben, Co-Founder and Co-Director, ParentsTogether.

"A business model built on extracting our attention at the cost of our well being is bad for everyone, but especially bad for children. No one knows this better than young people themselves, many of whom write to us daily about the ways in which Big Social is degrading their mental health. Left unregulated, Big Social will put profits over people every time. It's time to put our kids first. We urge Congress to act swiftly and enact reforms like strengthening privacy, banning surveillance advertising, and ending algorithmic discrimination for kids so we can begin to build a digital world that supports, rather than demotes child wellbeing." – Julia Hoppock, Partnerships Director, *The Social Dilemma*, Exposure Labs.

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